



State Legislative Update for the Week of May 25 - 29, 2015

5/21/15 – The Governor vetoed HF 844, Chapter 72, the Omnibus E-12 Education Finance Bill.

5/22/15 – The Governor signed HF 546, Chapter 66, the state government bill that will allow the state and local government veteran service entities to share military discharge forms with one another.

5/22/15 – The Governor signed SF 5, Chapter 69, the Omnibus Higher Education Finance Bill. This includes the establishment of a veterans-to-agriculture pilot program funded at \$175,000 in fiscal year 2016 and \$175,000 in fiscal year 2017.

5/22/15 – The Governor signed SF 1458, Chapter 71, the Omnibus Health and Human Services Finance Bill. This includes language stating Stearns County Veterans Housing receives \$85,000 each year of the biennium for a grant to Stearns County to provide administrative funding in support of a service provider serving veterans. It also includes \$100,000 in fiscal year 2016 for grants to nonprofit organizations to provide resources and referrals for culturally specific mental health services to Southeast Asian veterans born before 1965 who do not qualify for services available to veterans formally discharged from the United States armed forces.

5/22/15 – The Governor signed SF 878, Chapter 65, the Omnibus Public Safety and Judiciary Finance and Policy Bill. It contains a section regarding eligibility reciprocity examination for the firefighting occupation based on relevant military experience. A person who passed the examination shall not be eligible to be licensed as a firefighter until honorably discharged as evidenced by the most recent DD-214.

5/23/15 – The Governor signed SF 888, Chapter 77, the Omnibus State Government Finance bill. The bill contains the following items of veterans interest:

- The Office of the Legislative Auditor is to conduct a special review of the Department of Veterans Affairs financial management of Minnesota veterans homes. The review should include management of increasing compensation costs, including any projected increases in staffing levels; use of reserve funds in the special revenue fund to manage shortfalls in funding; implementation of federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services certification requirements; operation of the adult day care program at the Minneapolis campus; and, management of facilities operating costs, including plans to address the needs of aging facilities.

- \$44,000 for a transfer to the Department of Education to implement the expedited and temporary licensing provisions. This appropriation is available until June 30, 2017.
- \$353,000 to the Veterans Service Organizations: DAV, MOPH, American Legion, VFW, AMVETS, VVA, and Paralyzed Veterans of America.
- \$750,000 each year to Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MAC-V).
- \$200,000 each year for Honor Guards at funerals of veterans.
- \$200,000 each year for the costs of administering the Minnesota GI Bill postsecondary educational benefits, on-the-job training and apprenticeship program.
- \$100,000 each year for administering the Gold Star Program for surviving family members of deceased veterans.
- \$1.1M each year for funding the County Veterans Service Office grant program.
- General fund appropriations made to the department may be transferred to a veterans homes special revenue account in the special revenue fund in the same manner as other receipts are deposited.
- The department will seek opportunities to maximize federal reimbursements of Medicare-eligible expenses and will provide annual reports to the commissioner of management and budget on the federal Medicare reimbursements received.
- Before the commissioner certified that a small business is majority-owned and operated by a veteran, the commissioner of veterans affairs must verify that the owner of the small business is a veteran, as defined in section 197.447.
- Expedited and temporary licensing for former and current members of the military in a variety of skill areas.
- Money appropriated to the Department of Veterans Affairs from the “Support Our Troops” account has been expanded to include grants of up to \$100,000 to any organization approved by the commissioner for the purpose of supporting and improving the lives of veterans and their families and grants to an eligible foundation.
- The commissioner of veterans affairs must report by February each year to the chairs and ranking minority members of the committees with jurisdiction over military and veterans affairs on the number, amounts, and use of grants made from the “Support Our Troops” account in the previous year.
- Trustees appointed to the Big Island trust have the authority to remove a trustee of the trust upon a majority vote of the trustees with the consent of the commissioner of veterans affairs.
- Veterans who have been notified of intent to discharge may request a hearing in writing by a civil service board or commission, a merit authority or a three-person panel. If the veteran fails to identify the veteran’s election, the governmental subdivision may select the hearing body. For disputes heard by a civil service board, the political subdivisions shall bear all costs associated with the hearing but not including attorney fees for attorneys representing the veteran. For disputes heard by a three-person panel, all parties shall bear equally all costs associated with the hearing, but not including attorney fees for attorneys representing the veteran. If the veteran prevails in a dispute heard by a civil service board or a

- three-person panel and the hearing reverses all aspects of the discharge, the governmental subdivision shall pay the veteran's reasonable attorney fees.
- The Honor and Remember Flag is recognized as an appropriate symbol that acknowledges the ultimate sacrifice made by the fallen members of the United States armed forces in the line of duty and suggests days for flag display. The Honor and Remember Flag is protected by U.S. copyright.
 - The commissioner may not close a veterans home unless closure of the home is specifically authorized or required by a law enacted after July 1, 2015.

MDVA is fully funded through the Omnibus State Government Finance Bill.

5/23/15 – The Governor vetoed HF 846, Chapter 79, the Omnibus Agriculture, Environment, and Natural Resources Bill. Of veterans interest is the provision that allows a resident from a Minnesota veterans home to obtain a firearm or muzzleloader deer license during the season and take antlerless deer without a permit in all areas of the state open during the respective regular firearms or muzzleloader deer seasons in any permit area. A person may assist a Minnesota veterans home resident during the firearms or muzzleloader deer season without having a deer hunting license, but the person may not shoot a deer.

Neither the Legacy Bill, HF 303, nor the Tax Bill, HF 848, passed the Legislature.

As a result of the Governor's veto of the E-12 Education bill, the Agriculture, Environment and Natural Resources Bill, and the Jobs and Energy Bill, leadership is negotiating the time and content of a Special Session.